

Message Text

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EXDIS HANDLE AS NODIS

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SUBJECT: LEBANON: NEXT STEPS

REF: A. TEL AVIV 8367; B. STATE 168926; C. BEIRUT 3692

1. WE HAVE READ WITH CONSIDERABLE DISMAY CHAMOUN'S AND
BEGIN'S PLEAS FOR DECISIVE US INTERVENTION AGAINST THE
SYRIANS. BOTH THESE MESSAGES ARE SELF-SERVING. MANY
INCIDENTS DURING THE LEBANESE CIVIL WAR WERE FAR MORE
COSTLY IN TERMS OF HUMAN LIFE BUT THESE PARTIES REMAINED
SILENT BECAUSE THE VICTIMS WERE MUSLIM OR PALESTINIAN.

2. THE SYRIAN POSITION HAS BEEN STATED MANY TIMES AND WE
SHOULD HAVE NO ARGUMENT WITH IT IN PRINCIPLE. IT SEEKS TO
RESTORE THE AUTHORITY OF THE CENTRAL LEBANESE GOVERNMENT
UNDER PRESIDENT SARKIS THROUGHOUT LEBANON AND TO BRING

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ABOUT A NATIONAL POLITICAL RECONCILIATION. IT OPPOSES PARTI-
TION AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A CHRISTIAN MINI-STATE WITH
CLOSE TIES TO ISRAEL, ALONG WITH A PALESTINIAN-DOMINATED
MINI-STATE WHICH COULD DRAG SYRIA INTO ANOTHER WAR WITH
ISRAEL AT A TIME AND PLACE NOT OF ITS CHOOSING. ASSAD
HAS CONSISTENTLY STATED THAT SYRIAN TROOPS WOULD LEAVE
LEBANON WHEN THESE OBJECTIVES ARE ACCOMPLISHED. WE BELIEVE

INTERNAL PRESSURES ON HIM ARE MOUNTING TO WITHDRAW SYRIAN FORCES.

3. THERE IS NOT QUESTION THAT SYRIAN PERFORMANCE HAS NOT ALWAYS LIVED UP TO STATED INTENTIONS. WHEN IT SUITED SYRIAN POLICY TO COURT THE PALESTINIANS, SYRIA DRAGGED ITS FEET ON CONTROLLING THEM AND PERHAPS PUT OBSTACLES IN THE WAY OF REBUILDING THE LEBANESE ARMY. SYRIA ALSO INTERVENED IN THE PROBABLY FUTILE EXERCISE OF TRYING TO BUILD A POLITICAL GOVERNMENT IN LEBANON AND THEREBY ASSURED ITS FAILURE. SYRIA ALSO REMAINS INTERESTED IN A SECURITY AGREEMENT WHICH IS NOT NECESSARILY IN THE BEST INTEREST OF AN INDEPENDENT LEBANON.

4. NEVERTHELESS, OUR ARGUMENT WITH THE SYRIANS AT THE PRESENT TIME IS NOT THEIR PRESENCE IN LEBANON OR THE OBJECTIVES BEHIND IT. IT CONCERNS SPECIFICALLY THEIR VERY HEAVY-HANDED RESPONSE TO THE LATEST PROVOCATIONS AGAINST ADF FORCES BY CHRISTIAN MILITIAS IN EAST BEIRUT. WHILE NOT DEFENDING THE DISPROPORTION OF THIS RESPONSE, WE CAN SEEK TO UNDERSTAND IT. FOR TWO YEARS NOW THE CHRISTIAN MILITIAS HAVE RESISTED EVERY EFFORT TO ATTRACT THEM BACK INTO A CENTRAL LEBANESE STRUCTURE. THEY HAVE FLAUNTED THEIR INDEPENDENT-POWER AND HAVE CONSISTENTLY REFUSED TO CARRY OUT OR HAVE SLID AWAY FROM UNDERSTANDINGS REACHED WITH SARKIS AND THE ADF. THEY HAVE SNIPED AT SYRIAN PATROLS FROM THE ROOFTOPS OF EAST BEIRUT AND HAVE INTENTIONALLY AMBUSHED TRUCKLOADS
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OF SYRIAN SOLDIERS. SYRIAN PATIENCE UP TO THIS WEEK HAS BEEN REMARKABLE.

5. ANOTHER CONSIDERATION IS THE LIMITED MEANS AVAILABLE TO PRESIDENT ASSAD TO RESIST THESE PROVOCATIONS. PALAVER HAS GOTTEN HIM NOWHERE. HIS ARMY IS NOT TRAINED IN URBAN GUERRILLA WARFARE. IT HAS NEITHER THE ENERGY NOR THE CAPABILITY TO BRING EAST BEIRUT UNDER POLITICAL/MILITARY CONTROL THE WAY THE FRENCH PARAS FINALLY DID IN ALGIERS. HE IS NOW APPARENTLY SEEKING TO POUND THE MILITIAS' LEADERS INTO SUBMISSION, STOPPING EVERY FEW HOURS TO SEE IF THEY ARE READY TO SAY "UNCLE."

6. WITH THIS BACKGROUND IN MIND, DEPARTMENT'S SUGGESTED ARRANGEMENT STRIKES US AS PROBLEMATIC FOR THE FOLLOWING REASONS: A) IT WILL LEAVE CHRISTIAN MILITIAS INTACT AND ALL-POWERFUL IN MOUNT LEBANON AND EAST BEIRUT. FOR ALL PRACTICAL PURPOSES THERE WILL BE NO INSTRUMENT OF CENTRAL GOVERNMENT AUTHORITY IN THESE AREAS; B) THE CHRISTIAN POPULATION WILL BE SUBJECTED TO A DICTATORSHIP OF THE MILITIA LEADERS; C) THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT WILL HAVE LOST ITS SOLE EFFECTIVE MEANS OF INFLUENCING CHRISTIAN LEADERS

TOWARDS RECONCILIATION. FROM OUR PERSPECTIVE IT APPEARS THAT CHAMOUN AND PARTICULARLY THE GEMAYELS HAVE LAUNCHED AN EFFORT TO ESTABLISH THEIR DOMINION OVER CHRISTIAN LEBANON. THEIR ACTIONS AGAINST THE FRANGIEHS IN THE NORTH, THEIR TAKING OVER CONTROL FROM HADDAD AND SHIDIAC IN THE SOUTH, AND THEIR RENEWING PROVOCATIONS AGAINST THE SYRIAN ADF SUPPORT THIS CONCLUSION. THE FRAMEWORK WHICH THE DEPARTMENT PROPOSES WILL ALLOW THEM TO COMPLETE THIS DESIGN. IT IS ONLY A SHORT STEP FROM THERE TO FULL PARTITION.

7. LOOKING TOWARD THE MORE DISTANT FUTURE, WE SEE THE CURRENT FEUDAL STRUCTURE OF CHRISTIAN LEBANON AS INCREASINGLY ANACHRONISTIC. THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IN LEBANON, ALREADY A MINORITY, IS DIMINISHING IN SIZE AS ITS WARLORDS
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FIGHT EACH OTHER AND THE CREAM OF ITS TALENT EMIGRATES TO EUROPE AND THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE. THE MUSLIM COMMUNITIES, BOTH SHIITE AND SUNNITE, ARE STEADILY INCREASING THEIR MAJORITY AND AWAIT ONLY THE EMERGENCE OF A NEW GENERATION OF LEADERS TO EXERCISE IT. THE NEW LEBANESE STATE WHICH EMERGES FROM THE ASHES OF THIS CIVIL WAR WILL BE MUCH MORE MUSLIM IN CHARACTER THEN THE LEBANON WE KNEW AND MORE A PART OF THE ARAB WORLD. THE PASSAGE WILL BE LONGER AND HARDER IF IT MUST GO THROUGH THE TRANSITIONAL STAGE OF A FEUDAL CHRISTIAN MINI-STATE, BUT THE RESULT WILL BE THE SAME IN THE LONG RUN. WE WOULD LIKE TO SEE MORE MUSLIM REACTIONS TO THE EAST BEIRUT FIGHTING.

8. OUR OPTIONS, BROADLY SKETCHED, ARE THESE: A) TO LET THE CURRENT FIGHTING BETWEEN THE MILITIAS AND THE ADF AND ALSO THE INEVITABLE PHALANGIST-FRANGIEH BLOODLETTING RUN THEIR COURSE AND THEN ENCOURAGE SARKIS TO MAKE A NEW TRY AT NATIONAL RECONCILIATION WITH OUR STRONG SUPPORT ON ALL PARTIES. THE DIFFICULTY HERE IS THAT WE DO NOT KNOW WHERE IT WILL END. SARKIS MIGHT RESIGN. THE ISRAELIS MIGHT FEEL OBLIGED TO BECOME INVOLVED. FURTHERMORE, CONTINUED FIGHTING CAN ONLY FURTHER DIVIDE THE PARTIES AND MAKE RECONCILIATION EVEN MORE DIFFICULT TO ACHIEVE. B) TO CONTINUE TO URGE RESTRAINT ON ALL PARTIES, INCLUDING THE SYRIANS AND THE CHRISTIAN LEADERS WITH A VIEW TO ENDING THE CURRENT ROUND WITH A MINIMUM OF ADDITIONAL BLOODSHED AND RETURNING THE SITUATION MORE OR LESS TO STATUS QUO ANTE. ASSUMING WE CAN HELP STABILIZE THE SITUATION, WE BELIEVE WE MUST WEIGH IN STRONGLY AND SEVERLY WITH CHAMOUN AND GEMAYEL TO LET THEM KNOW THEY CANNOT COUNT ON OUR SUPPORT AND THAT THEY MUST INDEED COUNT ON OUR ACTIVE OPPOSITION SO LONG AS THEY ACT TO UNDERCUT THE CENTRAL LEBANESE AUTHORITY. IF WE CAN CONVEY THIS PROPOSED ACTION TO THE SYRIANS, IT COULD
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WEIGH IN FAVOR OF THEIR DECIDING ON A TRUE CEASE-FIRE.
C) TO WEIGH IN WITH THE SYRIANS TO WITHDRAW THE ADF
FROM EAST BEIRUT AND MOUNT LEBANON. THIS WOULD BE TANTAMOUNT
TO ACQUIESCING IN PARTITION.
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